



GeauxVote Smart!

Louisiana Citizenship Education Program

Louisiana's Old State Capitol
Museum of Political History
www.sos.la.gov/osc

CITIZENS

Rights and Responsibilities

A citizen is a member of a country, like the United States. American citizens play an important role in our democratic government. Find out more about what it means to be a citizen of the United States.

Who is a citizen?

A citizen of the United States is anyone who was

- Born in the United States
- Born in another country whose parent or parents are citizens of the United States
- A citizen of another country who is living legally in the United States and has passed a test on the Constitution and history of the United States to become a naturalized citizen
- Younger than 18 years of age when their parent or parents became a naturalized citizen

What are the rights of U.S. citizens?

The purpose of the United States government is to protect our rights to life, liberty and property. The U.S. government protects the rights of everyone, even non-citizens, living in the United States. However, U.S. citizens have special rights that non-citizens do not have. One special right reserved for citizens is the right to vote in government elections.

When Congress ratified, or approved, the U.S. Constitution in 1789, many people were concerned that it did not protect certain freedoms. They thought that the Constitution should be changed, or amended, to protect these freedoms. On December 15, 1791, the Bill of Rights—the first 10 amendments—were added to the U.S. Constitution. Our freedoms and rights protected by the Bill of Rights include

- Freedom of religion
- Freedom of assembly
- Right to keep and bear arms
- Freedom of speech
- Freedom of the press
- Protection for those accused of crimes

What are the duties of citizens?

The United States government is a government of the people, by the people and for the people. As citizens of the United States, we have important responsibilities, or things we must do, to make our country a better place to live. Citizens also play an important role in deciding how our government operates, or runs.

What are some characteristics, or traits, of good citizens?

Some characteristics of good citizens are

- Trustworthiness and honesty



- Courtesy and respect for the rights of others
- Responsibility and self-reliance
- Respect for the law
- Patriotism

Active citizens participate in government to make our country a better place to live. Some ways active citizens make a difference are to

- Register and vote
- Serve on a jury and make the best possible decision
- Obey our country's laws
- Influence government by speaking with or writing to elected officials
- Work on political campaigns
- Keep informed about current issues
- Respect the rights of others
- Pay taxes honestly and on time
- Volunteer and work to solve community problems

Activities

1. Read about citizenship in the U.S. Constitution.

[K - 3rd Grade](#)
[4th - 7th Grade](#)
[8th - 12th Grade](#)

In a small group discussion, make a list of your rights as a citizen of your family or class. How are these rights the same as or different from your rights as a citizen of the United States? With your group members, make a list of rights you think should belong to American citizens.

2. Read what the Bill of Rights says about the rights of citizens.

[Bill of Rights](#)

Working with your group members or partner, make a list of your responsibilities as a citizen of your class. Make a list of what you think the responsibilities of U.S. citizens should be. How are they the same and/or different?

3. Write these words on a sheet of paper:

Serve on a jury

Obey the law

Pay taxes

Vote

When people do not perform their duties as citizens, it affects all of us. With your partner, talk about what could happen if citizens do not perform each of the duties listed above. Write two results for each of the duties listed.

4. With your group members, discuss the answer to the following question. Give reasons for your answer. Share your ideas with the class.

Which is the most important duty of citizens?

5. Middle and High School Students:

Investigate the percentage of voting age citizens that are registered to vote. Investigate how many registered voters voted in the last three statewide elections. Produce graphs or charts to illustrate your findings.



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Lesson Plan: Rights and Responsibilities

Grade Levels	Elementary, middle and high school
Time	Adapt to meet needs
Overview	The introductory reading and supporting activities encourage classroom conversation and investigation about the rights and responsibilities of citizens. Teachers are encouraged to adapt the materials and activities to meet the needs, grade level and interests of their students.
Focus Question	What are the rights and responsibilities of U.S. citizens?
Materials	Citizens reading; computer and Internet access optional
Preparation	Make copies of the reading, one per student

Benchmarks

Pre-Kindergarten:

- What does it mean to be a member (citizen) of a group (family, class, school, community, neighborhood). (PK-SE-C1) (C-1D-E4)

Kindergarten

- Describe the student's role as a member of the family, class, and school (C-1D-E4)

First Grade

- Define the meaning of the term *classroom citizen* (C-1D-E1)
- Identify ways to participate in public service within school or community (C-1D-E5)

Second Grade

- Define the meaning of the term *community citizen* (C-1D-E1)
- Identify examples of responsible citizenship in the school and community settings (C-1D-E2)
- Discuss the elements of fair play and good sportsmanship, respect for the rights and opinions of others, and respect for rules (C-1D-E3)
- Describe actions individuals or groups may take to improve their community (C-1D-E4)

Third Grade

- Explain the responsibilities of individuals in making a community and state a better place to live (C-1B-E2)



- Identify the qualities of people who were leaders and *good citizens* as shown by their honesty, courage, trustworthiness, and patriotism (C-1D-E3)

Fourth Grade

- Identify the means by which individuals become U.S. citizens (C-1D-E1)
- Identify the rights and responsibilities of citizenship in making the nation a better place to live (C-1D-E2)
- Identify a national issue and describe how good citizenship can help solve the problem (C-1D-E5)

Seventh Grade

- Identify the qualifications or requirements for U.S. citizenship, including naturalization (C-1D-M1)
- Explain the importance of various rights and responsibilities of citizenship to the individual or to society at large (e.g., Bill of Rights) (C-1D-M2)

High School Civics

- Describe the importance of various rights of citizenship to the individual or to society at large (C-1D-H1)
- Describe various forms of political participation (C-1D-H3)
- Describe the importance of political leadership to American society, and identify ways in which citizens can exercise leadership (C-1D-H4)
- Identify examples of public service, and describe the importance of public service to American society (C-1D-H4)
- Evaluate the claim that American constitutional democracy requires the participation of an attentive, knowledgeable, and competent citizenry (C-1D-H4)

Vocabulary

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|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. assembly (assemble) | 7. jury |
| 2. Bill of Rights | 8. liberty |
| 3. citizen | 9. naturalized citizen |
| 4. U.S. Constitution | 10. responsibilities (duties) |
| 5. rights | 11. United States |
| 6. government | 12. vote |

Key Questions and Classroom Conversations

1. Who is a citizen? Use the reading to discuss the meaning of “citizen” and the different ways people become citizens of the U.S.
2. What are the rights of U.S. citizens? Use the following activity to introduce the concept of rights of citizens.



In a small group discussion, make a list of your rights as a citizen of your family or class. How are these rights the same as or different from your rights as a citizen of the United States? With your group members, make a list of rights you think should belong to American citizens.

3. What are the duties of citizens? Divide the class into groups of three or four students. Ask the following question to introduce students to the responsibilities of citizenship.

As a citizen of your class, what are your responsibilities? In a small group, make a list of what you think the responsibilities of U.S. citizens should be.

4. What are the characteristics of good citizens? Ask students to make a list of the characteristics of good classroom citizens. Ask students to consider how these traits are similar to and different from the traits of citizens of a country.
5. Discuss how people make their communities better places to live. Ask students to name some of the things citizens can do to make the U.S. a better place to live.
6. The Citizens reading contains suggestions for additional classroom activities and projects.